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HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

S E C R E T GABORONE 000566

NOFORN

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/EX, AF/RSA, F/S, AND DS  
ALSO PASS TO IBB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/11/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [AEC](#) [BC](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: HELPING BOTSWANA WITHOUT HARMING OURSELVES

REF: A. GABORONE 564

[B](#). GAORONE 554 (NOTAL)

[C](#). GABORONE 552

[D](#). GABORONE 548 (NOTAL)

[E](#). GABORONE 547

[F](#). GABORONE 525

[G](#). GABORONE 511

[H](#). GABORONE 376

[I](#). GABORONE 338

[J](#). GABORONE 239

[K](#). GABORONE 225

[L](#). 07 GABORONE 1344

[M](#). 07 GABORONE 298

Classified By: CDA Philip R. Drouin; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (S/NF) Given our recent reporting on the forward-leaning and principled position the GOB has recently adopted vis-a-vis Zimbabwe (Refs C, D, and E), and the resultant GOB-GOZ polarization that has prompted a formal GOB request for deeper USG support with more extensive security assistance (Ref B), post wishes to offer supplemental commentary as to the current situation Botswana is facing and how the United States might respond most appropriately. We have had additional conversations and have taken added soundings around official, military, and societal circles in and around Gaborone this past week, and we convened a core EAC meeting July 11 (Ref A). We also hope to make new trips upcountry in the coming weeks, up into the border regions with Zimbabwe for further on-site observations along the lines of those reported in Refs G and I. Our considered analysis follows, and especially as it relates to our important and visible Voice of America asset here.

[2](#). (S/NF) The Botswana government has for several months been concerned about the security of IBB's Voice of America (VOA) transmitting station located near Selebi-Phikwe, in the northeast corner of the country not far from where Botswana's Tuli Block converges with Zimbabwe and South Africa along the Shashe and Limpopo Rivers, respectively. Some of the station's news and other programming is specifically directed at Zimbabwe, and the Mugabe regime has long expressed displeasure with Botswana for hosting this facility. After picking up intelligence in May that indicated a possible threat to the station from the Zimbabwean government (Ref H), the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) has since placed small numbers of troops at the VOA facilities to provide 24-hour security in the form of roving patrols. We had also heard earlier from the GOB that this BDF protection was intended on their part to be only a temporary measure, notably implemented during the run-up period to the June 27 run-off

election in Zimbabwe. On July 8, the Botswana Minister of Defence, Justice, and Security mentioned in a meeting with the Charge that if the BDF were to become over-extended due to the Zimbabwe situation, the BDF might no longer be able to provide the troops now posted at the station. If this were to happen, the Minister went on, the United States would be welcome to provide any security personnel of its own that we might wish, including regular U.S. military forces (Ref B, notal).

¶3. (S/NF) Comment: The Minister's offer to allow U.S. forces to operate on the ground in Botswana is completely in keeping with the attitude of the new administration of President Ian Khama in the face of the unpredictable situation in Zimbabwe.

Previously, for example, the government provided the Embassy with assurances that uniformed military personnel could be used in Botswana to assist with the evacuation of any U.S. citizens fleeing Zimbabwe. That said, given the way the subject of U.S. troops came up in our recent conversation with the Minister, it does not seem likely that his comments were pre-planned, or that they are even fully-vetted GOB policy. While we felt compelled to report the Minister's candid comments as presented to us, rather it seems most likely that he was speaking to us in a frank manner about what he believes his government's response would be if a full-blown crisis with Zimbabwe stressed the BDF's limited manpower. As reported in Ref H, post remains unaware of any other specific threats at present, and we continue to monitor the situation closely (Ref A). It is therefore the view of this Mission that while an offer such as this (i.e., the GOB's willingness to accept U.S. military forces) is appreciated by us, and indicative of the strength of U.S.-Botswana relations, deployment of U.S. military personnel to secure the VOA station here should be considered only as truly the last available option.

¶4. (S/NF) Comment Continued: As we still await a tangible list of security assistance wants and needs from the GOB via the BDF (Ref B), the reftels (notably Refs J through M) also provide extensive background on President Khama's strategic thinking, decision-making style, his views of and inclinations towards the United States, and the GOB's early sentiments vis-a-vis U.S. security assistance and AFRICOM. Again, we wish to offer to our readers this added context concerning the present realities on the ground in Botswana. We hope this additional perspective will be of use in ongoing deliberations on how best the USG should work to help Botswana, without hurting ourselves and key U.S. interests in this country as well as throughout the region. End Comment.

DROUIN